

State Parks and Forests: Funding

Staff Findings and Recommendations
January 23, 2014

Introduction

- Study Focus:
 - Compare expenditures and revenues and assess adequacy of state park funding to support short- and long-term operational needs.
- Presentation:
 - Background
 - Expenditures
 - Revenue
 - Staffing
 - Park Use, Performance Measures, Planning
 - Operations and Funding Options

Background

- State park and forest system consists of a variety of resources; term “parks” used to collectively refer to parks and forests
 - 107 state parks
 - 32 state forests
 - 255,000 acres
- Park system designed to provide:
 - Natural resource-based outdoor recreation
 - Protection of natural areas
 - Educational opportunities and programs

Background

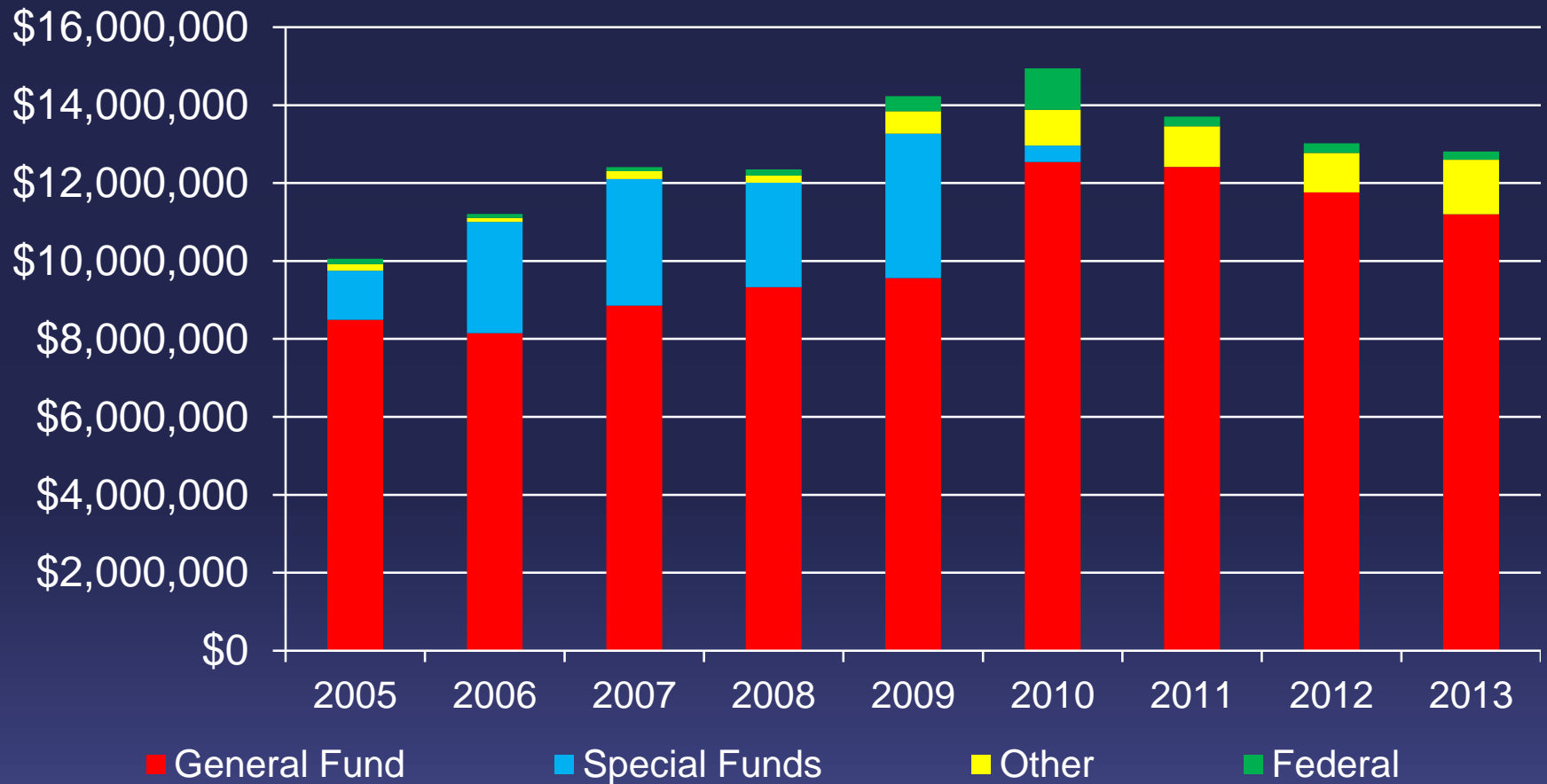
Park System Organization

- Bureau of Outdoor Recreation State Parks
 - Public Outreach Division
 - Two districts (East, West)
 - 23 management units (11 in East; 12 in West)
 - Field Staff (maintainers, supervisors, and part-time seasonal workers)

Expenditures

Expenditures

Funding Sources (non-capital)



Source of data: DEEP

Expenditures

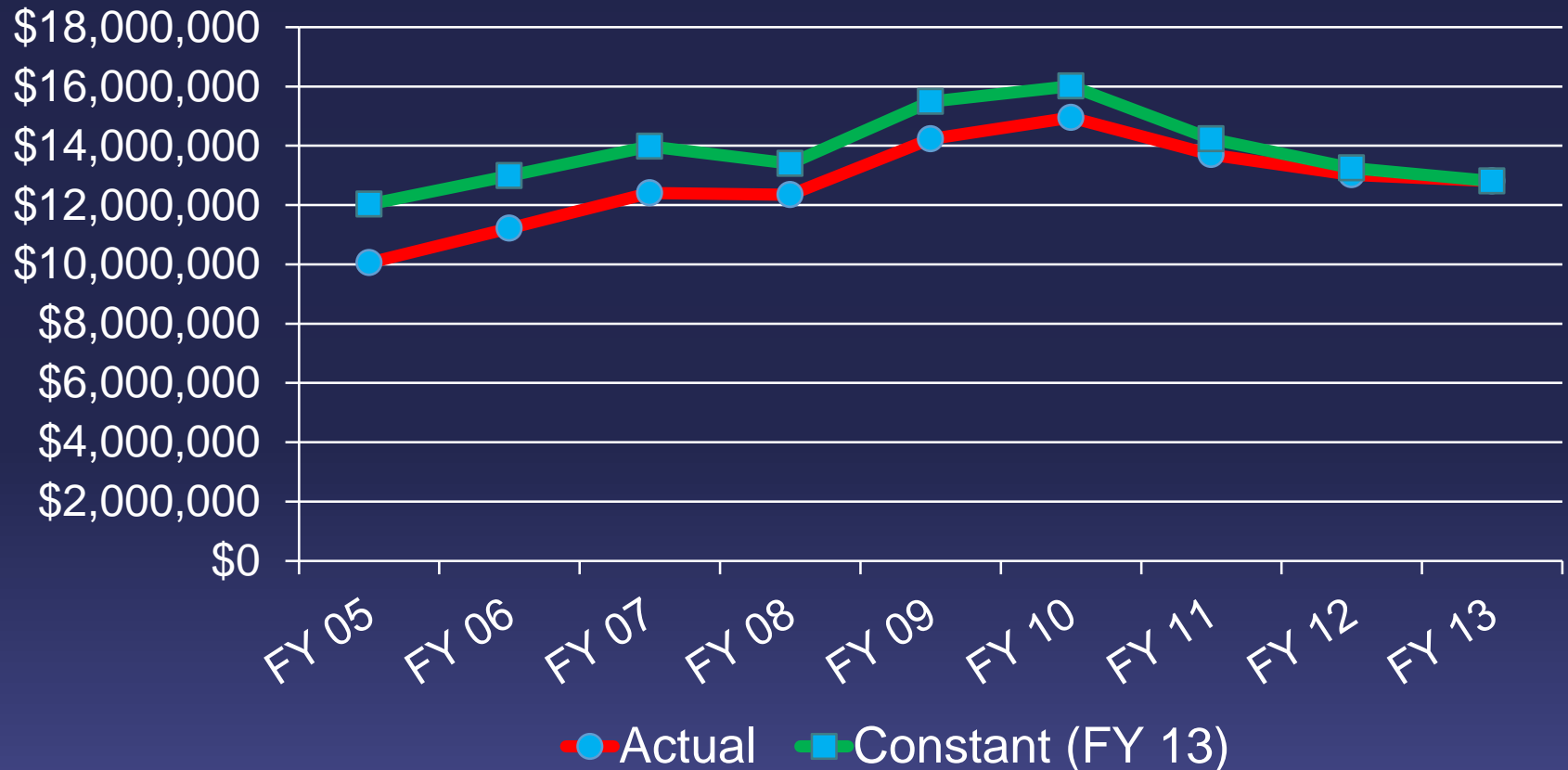
- Some, but not all, of the required reports showing MRI account activity produced
- MRI accounts currently not used to offset maintenance costs associated with renting cabins; expenditures come from operating budget
- In-kind contributions to state parks is substantial; not fully considered by division for budget and planning purposes

Recommendations (1-3)

- **(1) DEEP should fully develop and submit necessary reports required by statute for Maintenance, Repair, and Improvement revenue and expenditures**
- **(2) A portion of the annual fees collected from cabin rentals should be deposited into the Maintenance, Repair, and Improvement account for parks with such cabins and used to help offset cabin maintenance costs**
- **(3) DEEP should coordinate with Friends groups and other parks associations to ensure in-kind contributions by such groups are fully considered for budget and planning purposes**

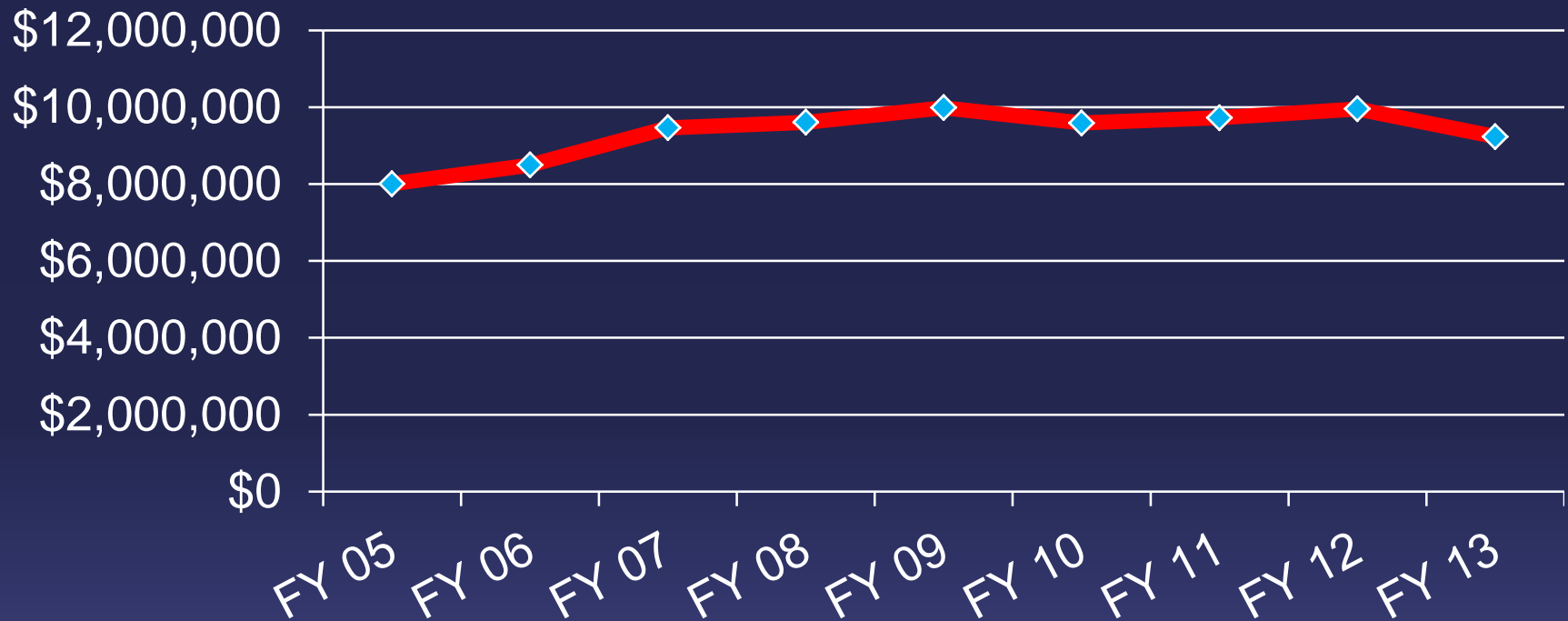
Expenditures

Actual vs. Constant



Expenditures

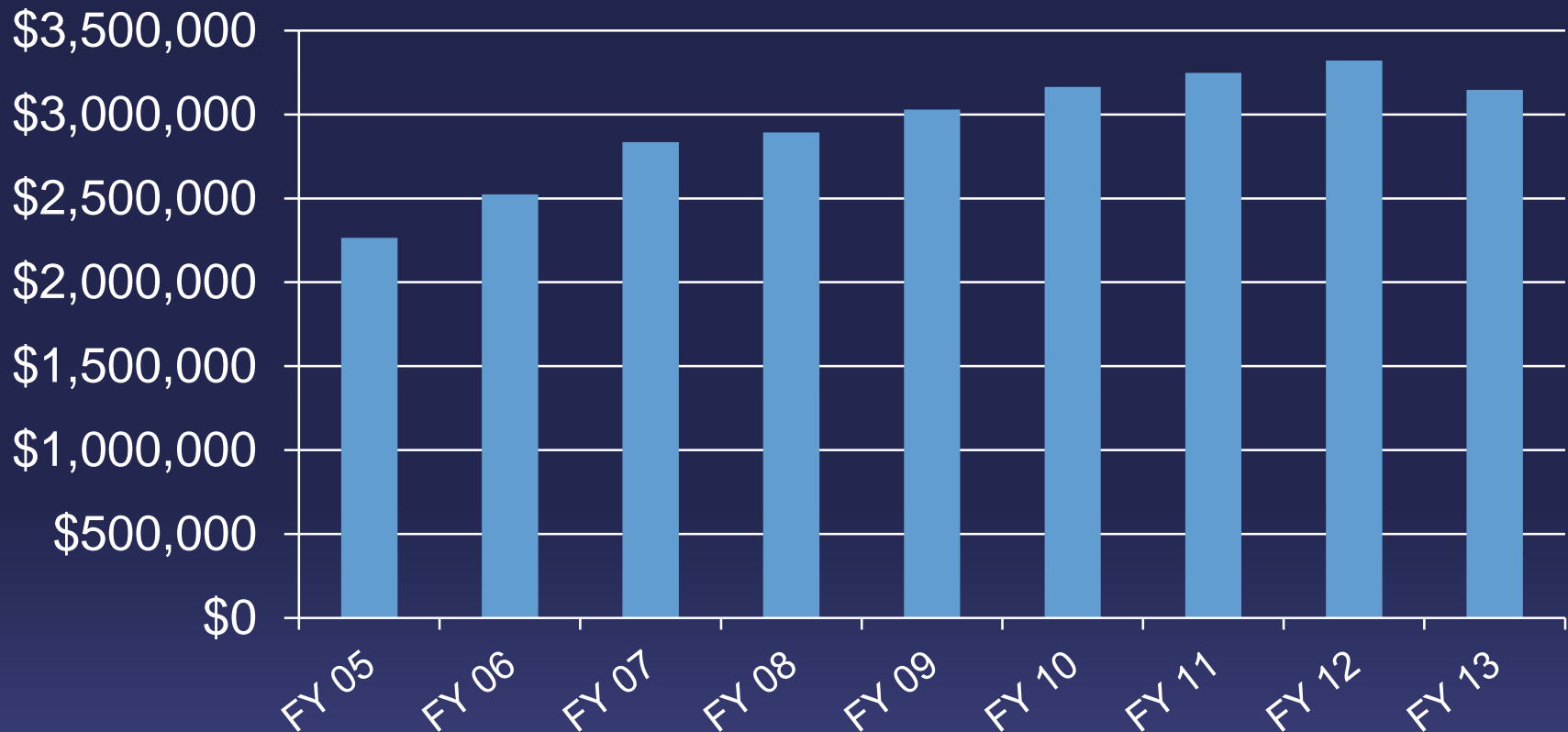
All Personnel



Source of data: DEEP

Expenditures

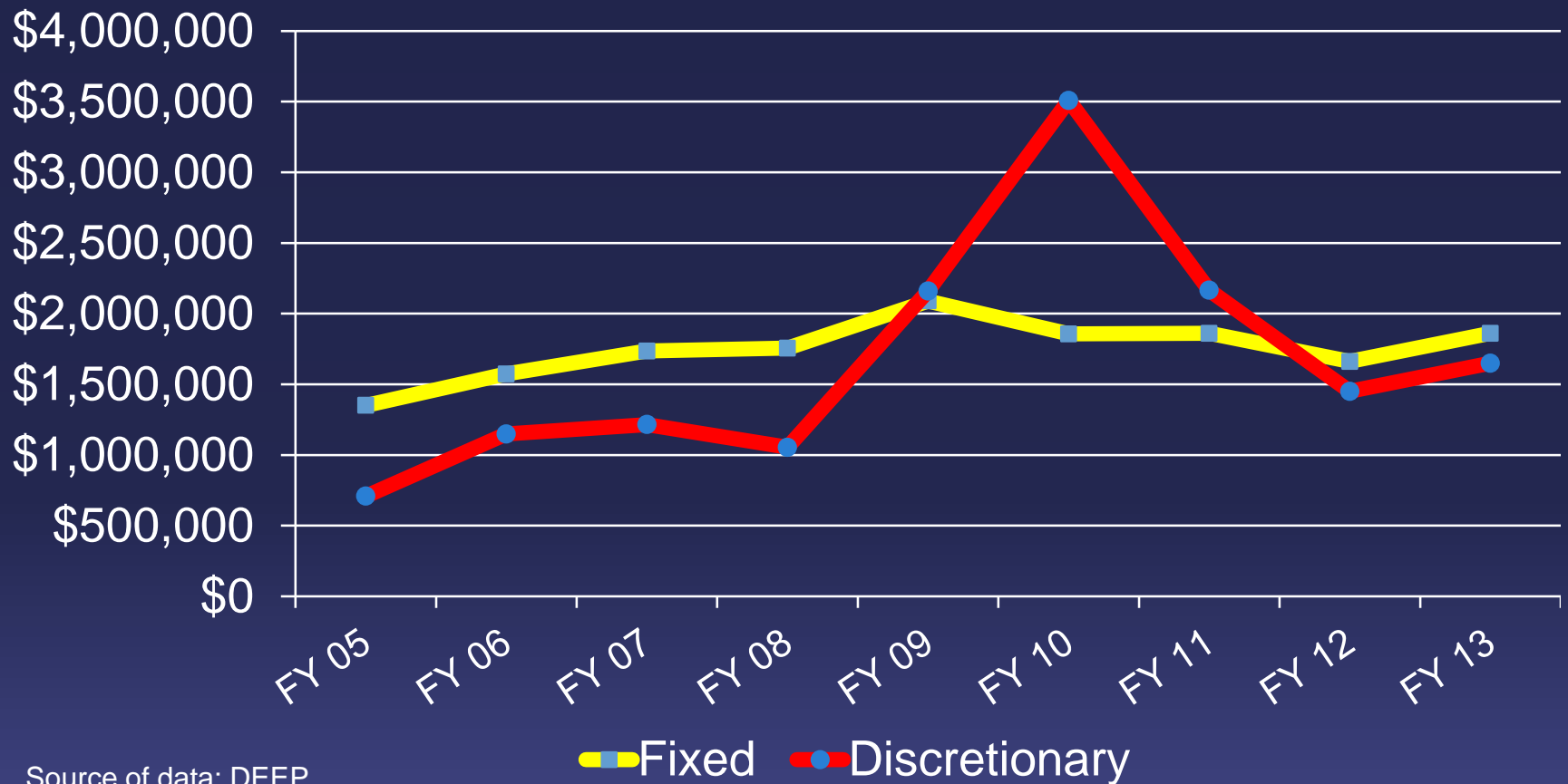
Seasonal Workers



Source of data: DEEP

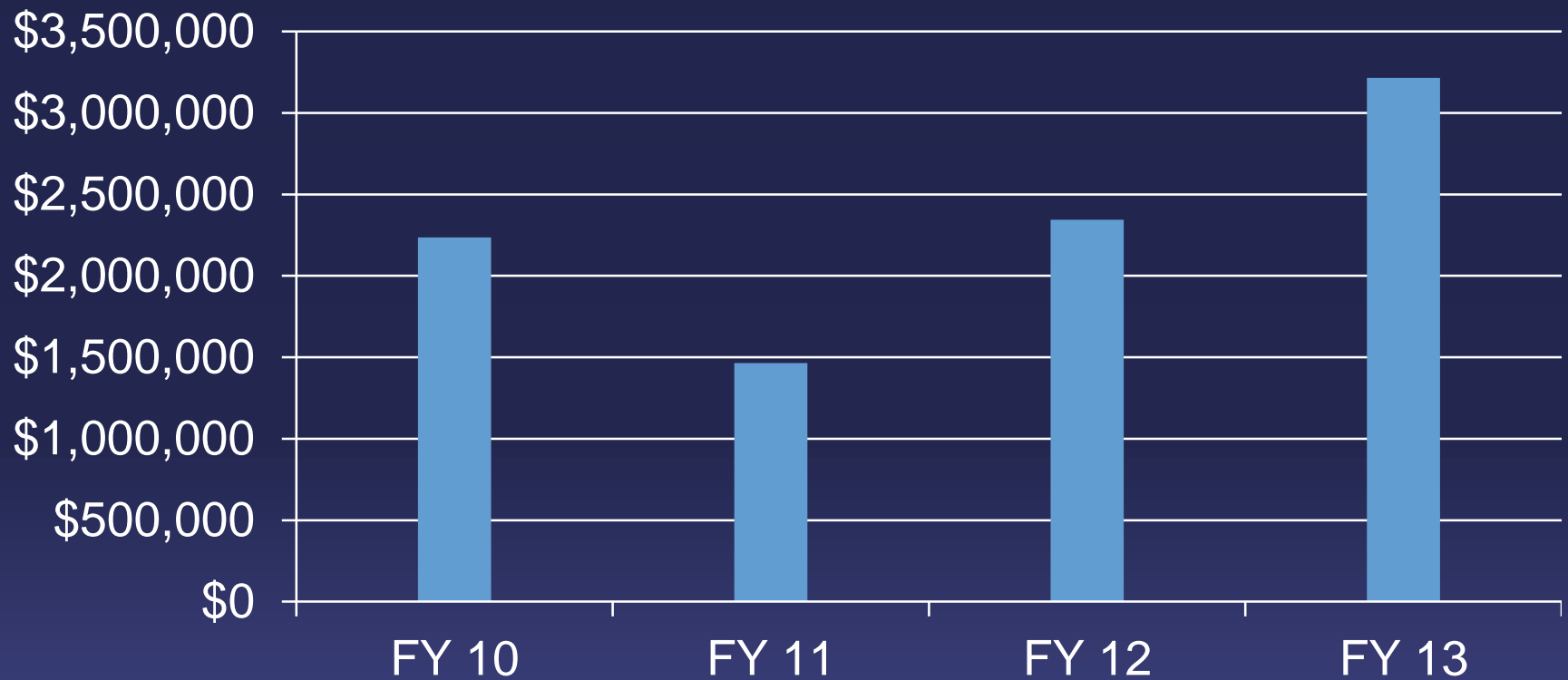
Expenditures

Fixed and Discretionary



Expenditures

Capital

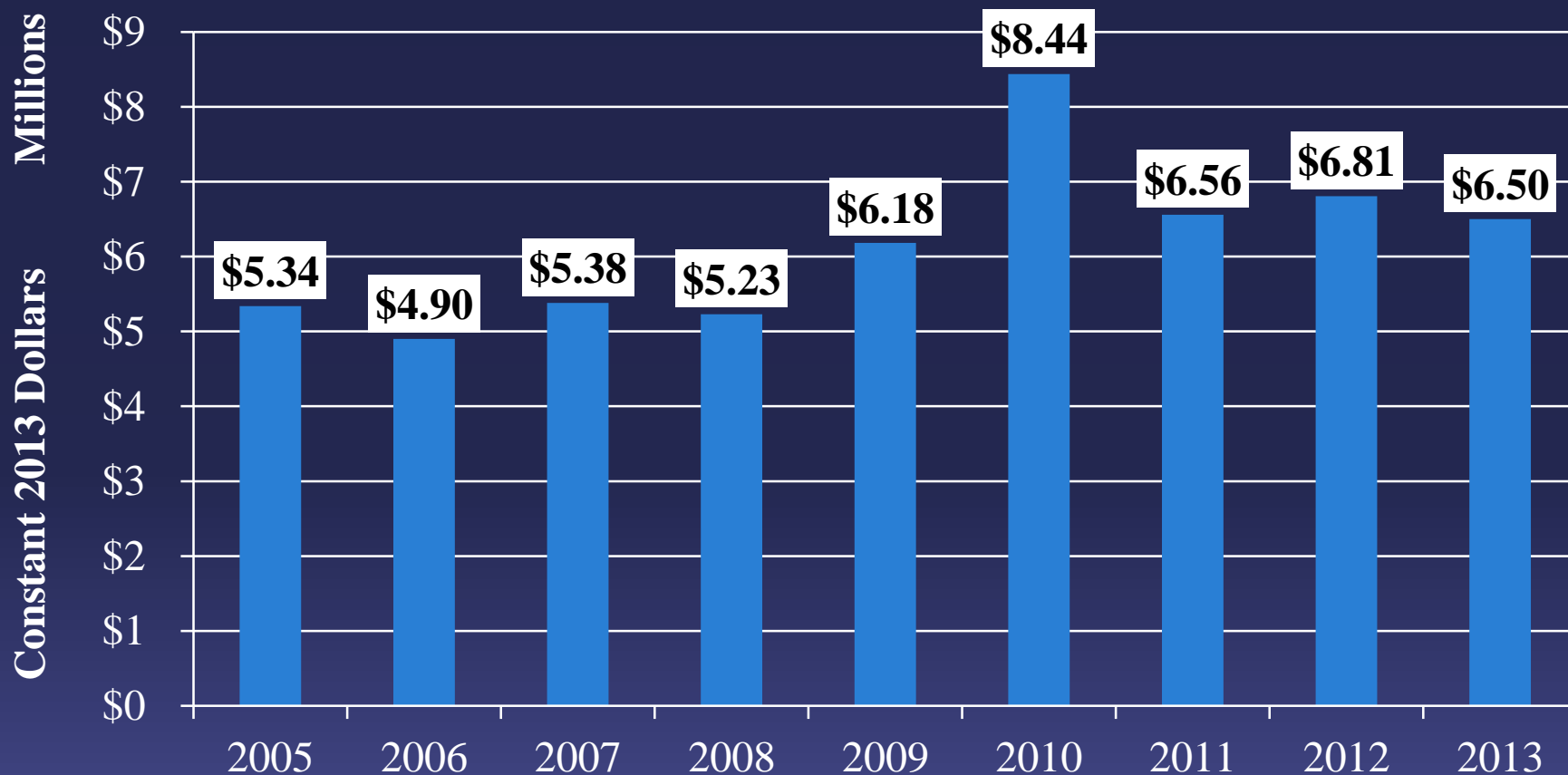


Source of data: DEEP

Park-Generated Revenue

Park-Generated Revenue

Connecticut State Park Revenues (CYs 05-13)



Park-Generated Revenue

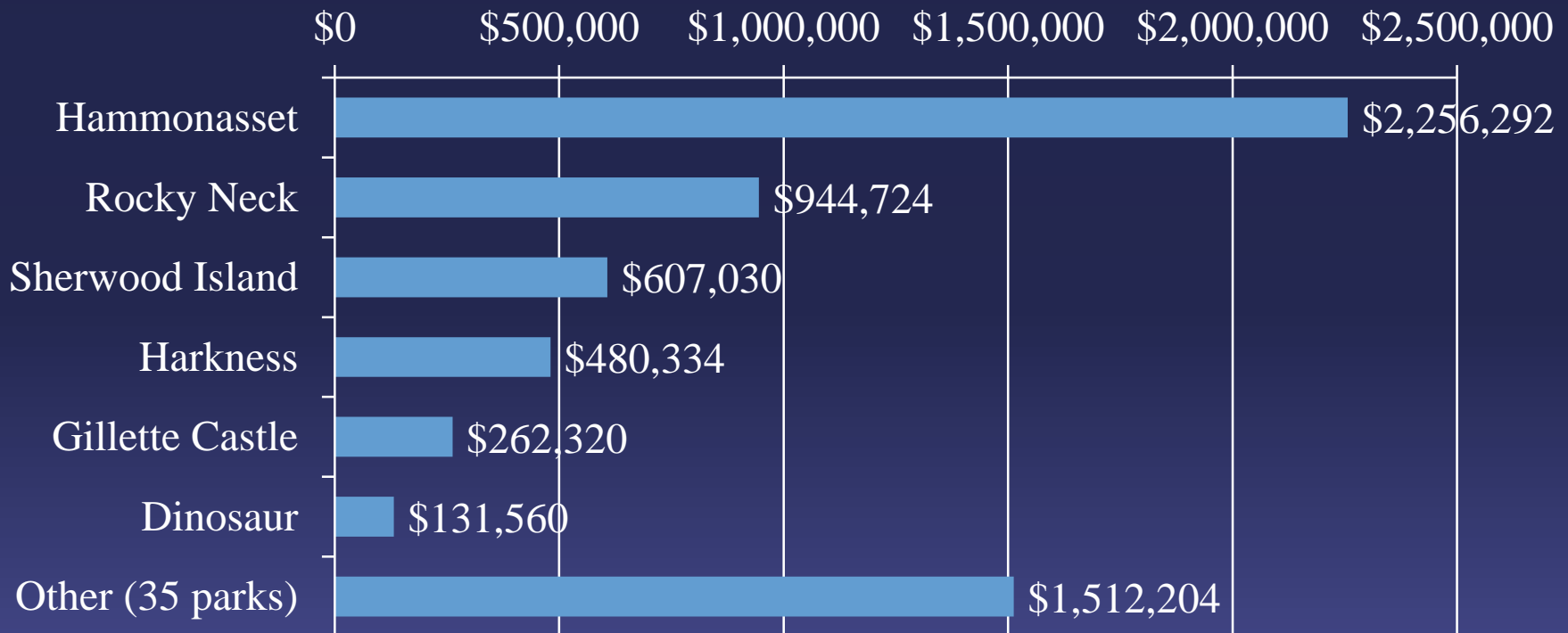
- Connecticut relies more heavily on day use fees than do other states

State Park Revenues by Source (FY 12)		
	Total of All States	Connecticut
Entrance Fees	24%	62%
Overnight Stays/Camping	43%	33%
Restaurants	4%	0%
Concessions	7%	2%
Beaches/Pool	1%	0%
Golf Courses	5%	0%
Other	16%	4%
Source of data: AIX		

Park-Generated Revenue

- Three-quarters of park-generated revenues in Connecticut come from six of the 139 parks

Revenues by Park (CY 13)



Park-Generated Revenue

- Connecticut's fees are generally at or above other states
 - But fewer parks charge entrance fees
- Higher than Massachusetts/New York (\$2-10 per vehicle)
- In line with New Jersey/Rhode Island (\$5-28 per vehicle)

Summary of Passenger Vehicle Entrance/Parking Fees (FY 12)

	% of park locations charging for entrance	Resident	Non-Resident
Connecticut	19%	\$6.00-13.00	\$10.00-22.00
Range	1-100%	\$0.50 – 15.00	\$0.50 - \$30.00
Median	49%	\$5.00	\$5.00

Table does not include 18 states without vehicle fees in analysis.

Source of data: AIX

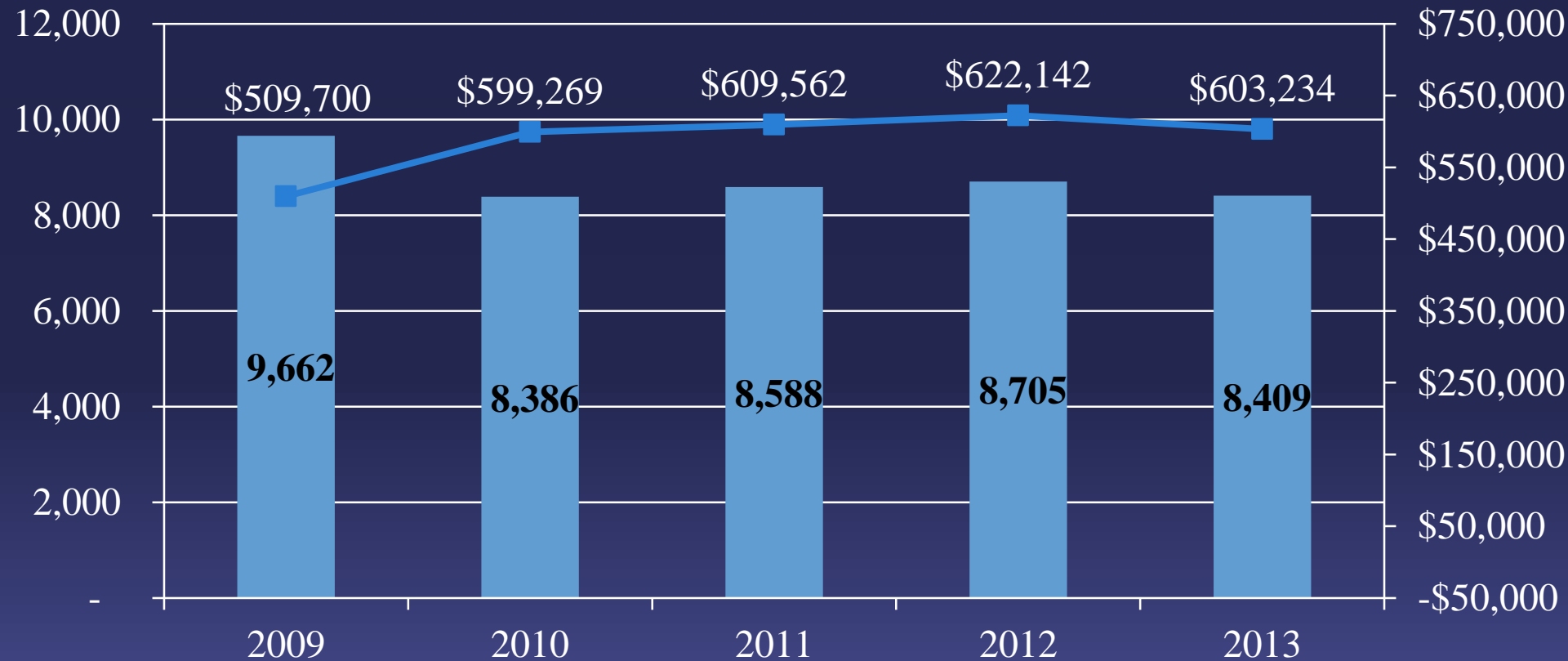
Park-Generated Revenue

Special Passes				
Pass Type	Eligibility	Use	Cost	# Issued CY 13
Charter Oak Pass	CT Residents 65 and over	Lifetime Parking and Admission	Free	3,529
Disabled Veteran Pass	CT Resident Veterans with Service Related Disability	Lifetime Parking and Admission	Free	176
Heritage Passport	One year of unlimited access to Gillette, Dinosaur, Ft. Trumbull for a family		\$67	10
Season Pass	Unlimited parking for one car for one calendar year		\$67 (CT) \$112 (non)	8,399

Source of data: DEEP

Park-Generated Revenue

Paid Passes per Calendar Year (Number and Revenue) (CYs 09-13)



Number sold does not include lifetime passes

Source of data: DEEP

Recommendation (4)

- **The use of season and lifetime passes should be tracked by pass type when parks are otherwise charging for parking or admissions**

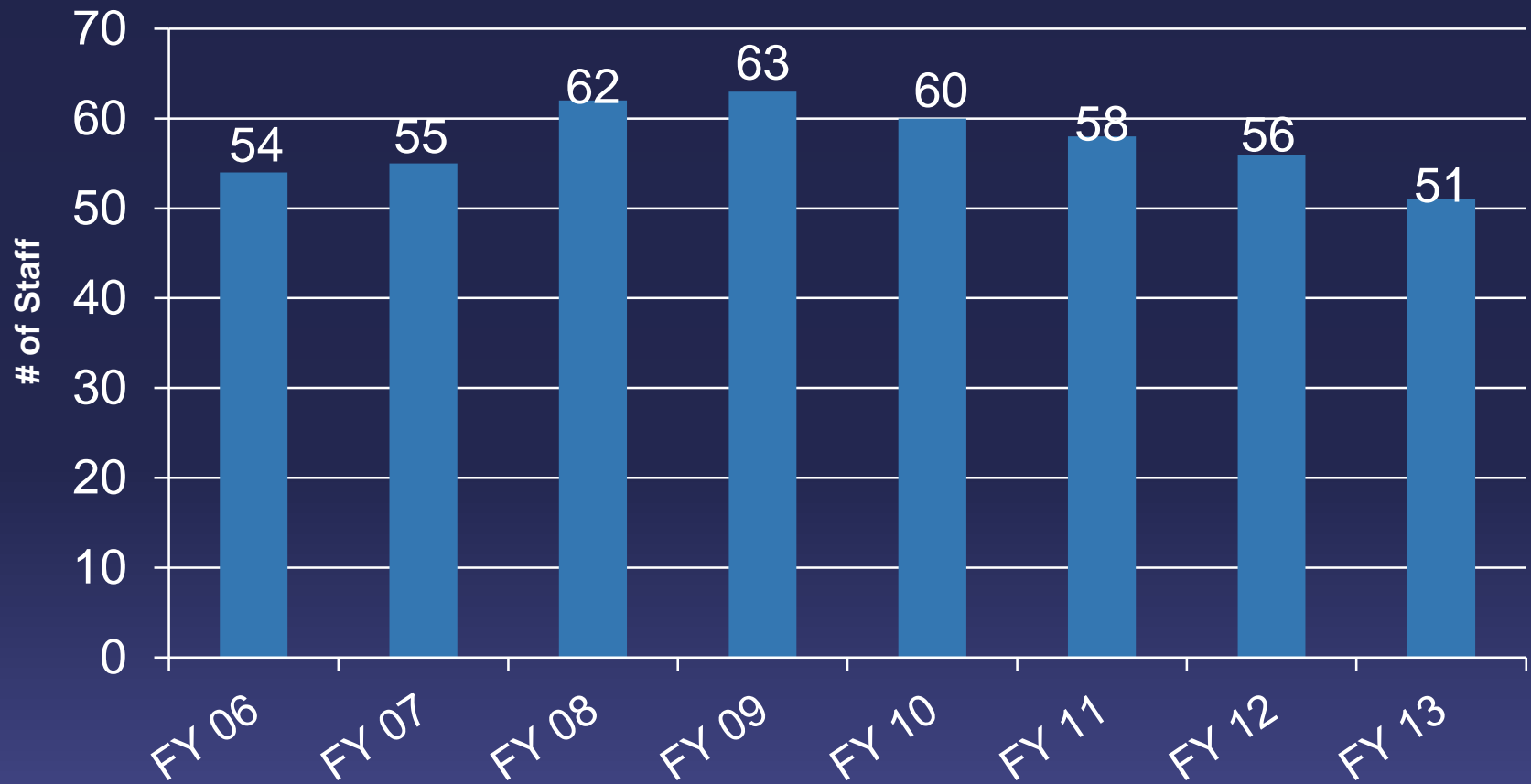
Park-Generated Revenue

- Connecticut's park-generated revenues appear low relative to the size of the park system and other states
 - CT parks do not include major revenue generators from other states
 - Pools, golf courses, restaurants, lodges
- Increased revenues may be available if desired
 - would need an initial investment
- Several ways to increase revenues:
 - Increase ticket booth hours of operation
 - Explore automation options in less used parks
 - Increase attendance

Staffing

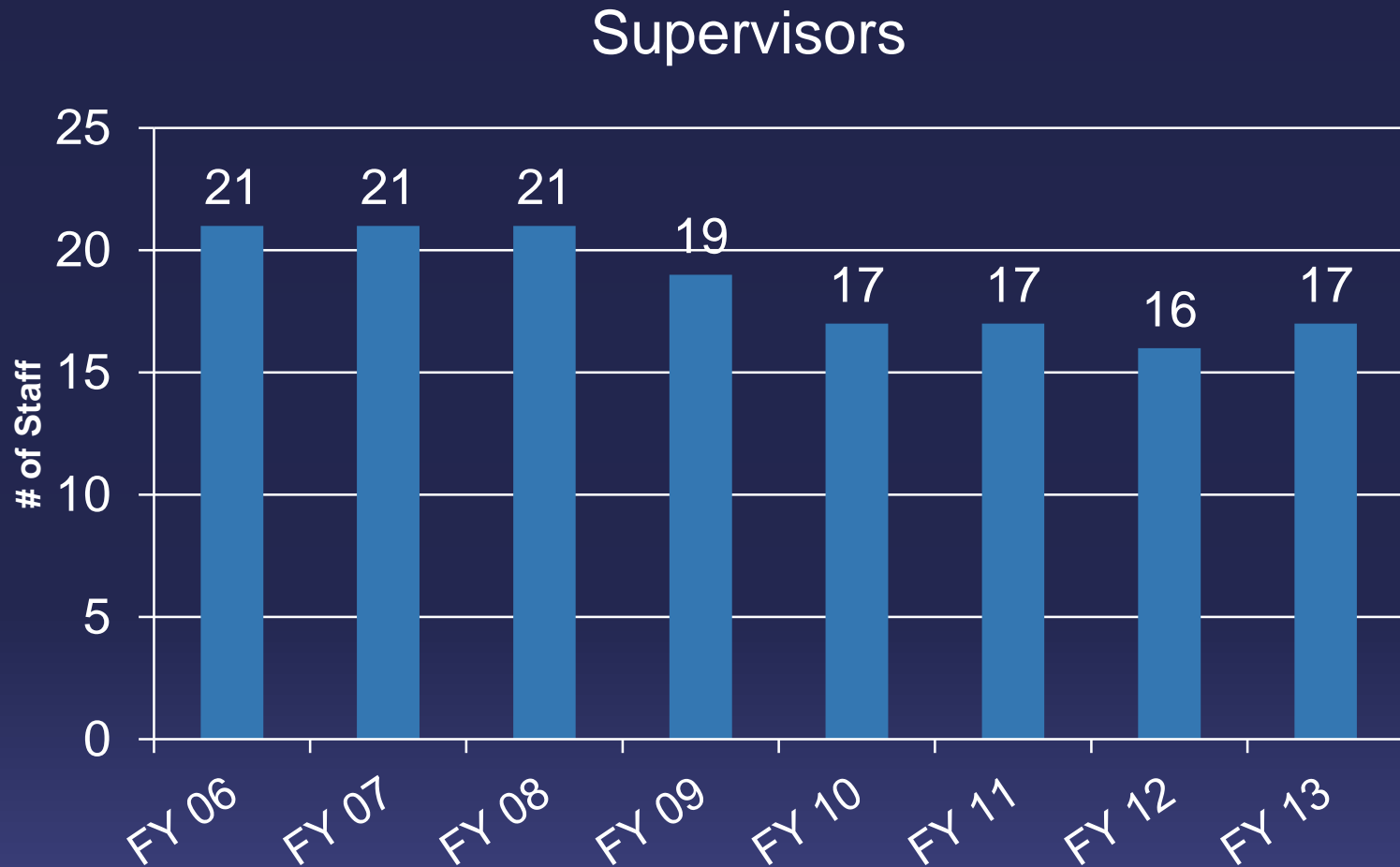
Staffing

Maintainers



Source of data: DEEP

Staffing



Source of data: DEEP

Staffing

- A contract provision allows maintainers and supervisors allows to rotate work locations every two years, possibly causing an experience void in some management units
- Six of 23 management units lack a full-time supervisor dedicated to those specific units
- Impending retirements could negatively impact park services if positions are not refilled (61% of supervisors and 32% of maintainers have 25 or more years of state service)

Staffing

- The current number of maintainers does not allow for a balance between minimum safety guidelines established by DEEP and workload capacity
- Some of Connecticut's work rules may limit flexibility of seasonal staff in comparison with other states
- An additional six supervisors and six maintainers are necessary for management units to return to an acceptable, on-going staffing level

Park Use, Performance Management, and Planning

Performance Management

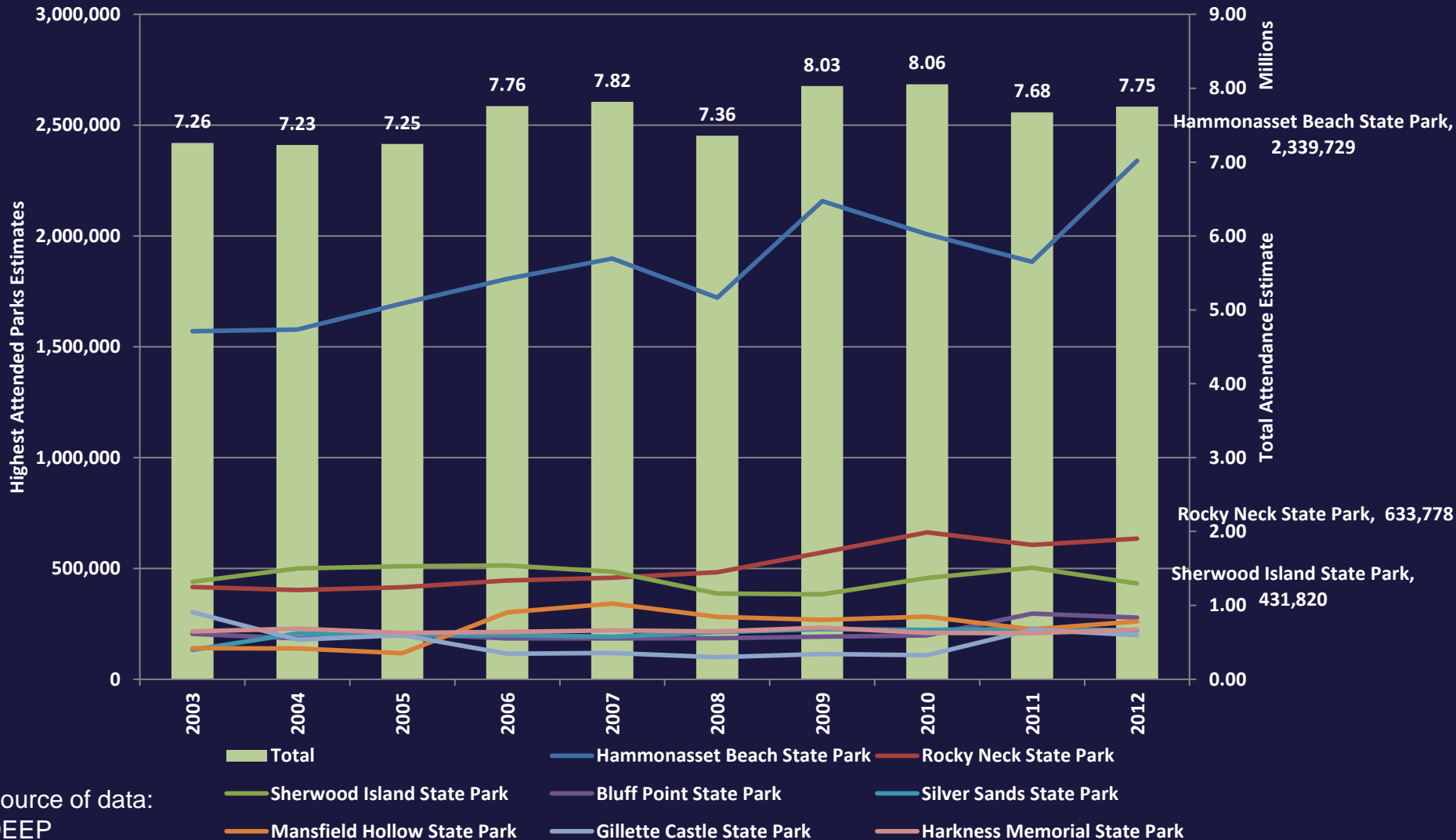
- Parks Division personnel identified 3 main drivers of park performance
 - Attendance
 - Safety
 - Customer satisfaction
- Data collection and analysis for all three areas is lacking
- Parks Division does not engage in measurement of park performance to guide management decisions and resource allocations.

Recommendation (5)

- **The Parks Division should create an RBA report card regarding park performance**
- **The report card should include key measures:**
 - **Park Use**
 - Attendance
 - Safety
 - Customer satisfaction
 - **Park operations (e.g., planning efforts)**
 - **Park personnel**
- **First report card should be developed by January 1, 2015, and annually thereafter**

Attendance

Attendance Estimates (CYs 03-12)



Attendance

- Parks Division attendance estimate methodology has several flaws and is not currently followed in a consistent manner
 - Only provides estimates for 55 of 139 state parks
- Current method is overly burdensome to park supervisors
- Not using the reliable attendance data already being collected in a meaningful way
 - Paid use is tracked with park-generated revenues
 - No formal extrapolation from paid use to overall use

Recommendations (6,8)

- **(6) The Parks Division should develop an improved attendance estimation methodology**
 - Spread responsibility for point-in-time counts
 - Requires the performance of focused counts every five years
 - Use data already available via revenue collection
 - Expand the use of car counters
- **(8) DEEP should buy car counters with current bonding authority**
 - Need enough car counters to assist in comprehensive weeklong counts for each park every five years

Attendance

Attendance ranges and entrance fees (CY 11)

Attendance range	# parks with estimated attendance levels	# of parks per attendance level with entrance fees
0-50,000	13	5
50,001 - 100,000	27	14
100,001 -200,000	7	4
Over 200,000	8	6

Source of data: DEEP attendance estimates and DEEP revenue

Recommendation (7)

- **The Parks Division should review the use and level of fees for each park location not less than once every five years**
- **Regularly reconfirm where and when fees make sense**

Safety

- Visitor safety: the trend in the number of incidents - and specific types of incidents directly related to personal safety - is generally mixed since FY 08
- Worker safety: no safety-related grievances filed in the last five years; the annual number of workers' compensation claims since FY 10 ranged from 12 to 23
- The Parks Division has not established formal park safety metrics, precluding system-wide analysis

Recommendation (9)

- **As part of its RBA report card, the Parks Division should:**
 - **Develop formal metrics of safety within the state park system, including safety of the general public and division employees**
 - **Collect and analyze applicable safety-related data necessary to identify trends in the annual number and types of safety-related incidents on a system-wide basis**

Customer Satisfaction

- Division uses several methods to collect park visitor satisfaction; no formal aggregate review is made to identify systemic issues
- DEEP online survey shows a high percentage of park visitors were satisfied with their visits; several areas were identified as needing improvement
- Department provides services to increase accessibility to state parks
- Park supervisors report relatively few conflicts among users on a system-wide basis

Planning

- Short-term planning for the state park system has defaulted to “crisis management”
- Some long-term documents
 - Not used systematically
 - Not updated regularly
- System-wide project priorities are not established or made clear to field staff
- Field personnel are not involved in budget development and administration
 - May lead to increased costs

Recommendation (11)

- **The Parks Division shall perform a formal review of all park locations**
 - Each year, a portion of parks will be reviewed
 - All park locations reviewed at least once by 2020
 - Ongoing - all parks reviewed every five years
- **Include an inventory and assessment of the condition of resources and facilities**
- **Reassess staffing needs of each location**

Recommendations (10,12)

- **(10) The Parks Division should develop written criteria and procedures for project approval based on the division's system-wide priorities**
 - **Project application status and evaluation of merit should be communicated back to the applying supervisors**
- **(12) Field staff (i.e., district managers and unit supervisors) should be involved in budget development and administration**
 - **Allow some portion of any realized savings to be used at the discretion of the unit's supervisor**

Operations and Funding Options

Operations and Funding Options

- There is an imbalance between the current level of service provision and current funding and staffing resources
- Parks Division has made efforts to limit the public exposure of decreases in service
 - Current levels of service are at or below the point where additional cuts can be made without a decline in the public perception of the availability or quality of service provided
- Current resources may be adequate for maintaining current service provision levels in the short-term
 - Unclear how long
- Either an increase in funding and staffing or a decrease in services is necessary for long-term
 - Even with improved planning and priorities, there remains an imbalance

Operations and Funding Options

PRI staff looked at viability of four scenarios

- Option One: Reduced Services
- Option Two: Optimal Staffing
- Option Three: Continuation
- Option Four: Performance Contingent Increases

Recommendation (13)

- **Appropriate portion of park-generated revenue to the Parks Division, contingent upon satisfactory participation in the RBA process**
 - **Additional funding shall not supplant the General Fund obligation to the Parks Division**
 - **The Parks Division shall create a plan for use and distribution of park-generated revenue**
 - **Initial funding distribution plan should emphasize implementation of performance metrics and related data-gathering and analysis**

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